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A GREAT FARMER: DAVID FRANKLIN HOUSTON

BY J. C. HEMPHILL

[It is a circumstance bearing full confidence and no little comfort that this particular time, when necessarily enormous powers are conferred upon the Department of Agriculture, finds David Franklin Houston its level head. How he happened to be selected for the position four years ago matters not at all. Mr. Hemphill, whose admirably succinct account of his work is presented herewith, attributes the choice to the President's intuitive recognition of his possession of certain valuable attributes. Maybe so; we had supposed that luck and Colonel House had much to do with it; but never mind! It was a happy hit, and we are more than pleased to endorse heartily from personal knowledge Mr. Hemphill's appreciation of true worth and unflagging industry in high public service. None whom we know is better equipped for the satisfactory performance of the great work with which Secretary Houston must grapple. But the intuition was of the parents who named him. David had vision; Franklin had sense; Houston has both; and it is greatly to his advantage that before reaching a conclusion he rolls a thought over and over in his mind, much as a cow chews a cud.—EDITOR.]

THERE were great farmers before David Franklin Houston, the United States Secretary of Agriculture; there was never one who managed so large a plantation. There was Job, who employed five hundred yoke of oxen in ploughing his fields, and the Pharaohs of Egypt, who depended upon the wind to winnow their wheat, the feet of their flocks to plant their seed, and the silt of the Nile to fertilize their fields; and there was Marcus Porcius Cato, the Roman, who lived one hundred and forty-nine years before the Christian Era and who had profited by the experiences and failures of the earlier farmers to teach the economic value of intensive cultivation, the use of leguminous plants for soil improvement, the importance of live stock in a system of general farming,

and the effective preservation of manure as essential to the success of agriculture.

Some years ago Fairfax Harrison, now president of the Southern Railway, wrote a book, *Cato's Farm Management*, for private circulation, in which he said: "Barring some developments of bacterial science, like the ingenious 'nodular hypothesis' in respect to legumes, the student of farm management today could not go far wrong if he founded modern instances of agricultural experience upon the wise saws of this sturdy old heathen." Better still, the student of farm management could not go wrong at all if he followed the counsel of the quiet, self-contained, non-advertising, wisest Christian successor the heathen philosopher has had in two thousand years. Of demonstrated executive ability, a teacher of long and varied experience, a scholar and thinker well in advance of his times, a man of force and vision—that is why Mr. Houston was selected by the President for his present work. Brought up in an agricultural community, for a number of years he did everything on a farm that had to be done. He has not figured very prominently in the press because his work has not been of the sensational order, but he has accomplished wonderful things in making the Department of Agriculture the most effective arm of the Government.

The work of the Department is covered in three general classes:

1. Research work, which includes the scientific study of the fundamental problems of agriculture.
2. Educational or extension work, which aims to make available to the rural population the results of the Department's experiments and discoveries.
3. Regulatory work, which includes the enforcement of statutes relating to meat inspection, animal and plant quarantine, foods and drugs, game and migratory birds, seed adulteration, insecticides and fungicides, the manufacture of vaccines and viruses, and the administration of the national forests.

For the purpose of carrying out these several grand activities of the Department numerous divisions or sections have been organized, each doing its particular bit under the direction of the most competent men available for the special service required. The Department of Agriculture is a strictly business institution, devoted wholly to the very defi-

nite end of making agriculture efficient and profitable and rural life in the United States comfortable, healthful, and attractive. With its 17,000 employees and an annual budget of \$35,000,000 in round figures, it is the greatest constructive agency in the world. There is no politics in the organization of its many divisions and in the selection of its multitude of agents. Of the 17,000 employees only three of those holding positions of responsibility are not covered in the classified service. The only test of service is fitness; the only rule of tenure is efficiency.

What does the Department do? Nearly everything affecting the life of the people. The "Programme of Work" of the Department for the current fiscal year fills a book of five hundred pages, in which are outlined the projects of each bureau and office, with an indication of the object, co-operative relationships of such projects, and with the purpose of so informing the workers as to what is expected of them that there will be such correlation of work and co-ordination of effort as will reduce useless duplication. Take the Office of Farm Management, for example, and the work this year will cover, as it did last year, investigations in farm economics showing the cost of growing sugar beets, potatoes, and cotton, the cost of producing hay and grasses, corn silage, and fruit, with full account of all the economic factors involved and exact conclusions of the best methods to be employed in these several enterprises based upon actual demonstrations in field and orchard. In like manner the most careful investigations will be conducted in the field of live-stock economics, covering the cost of feeder cattle, beef cattle, dairy cattle, the raising of colts and farm horses, and the cost of producing dairy products with relation to the profits of the farm business. The most interesting of the investigations made by this office will cover the history and distribution of farm enterprises, analysis of the farm business, the cost of the farmer's living, the principles of farm tenantry, the cost of farm equipment, the method of farm accounts, the application of farm economics to farm practice, and the question of farm organization in certain well-defined districts covering the different sections of the country from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The same character of work is being done in all the other fourteen offices, bureaus, or divisions of the Department—investigation, administration, regulation—and all these multitudinous activities the Sec-

retary of Agriculture directs with the sole object of making his work most effective for the common good.

From its very humble beginning in 1839, with desk room in the Patent Office, then attached to the State Department, for the collection of statistics and the distribution of seed at an expense of \$1,000, to the Department of this day, with its annual budget of \$36,000,000, and pledges amounting to \$150,000,000 for expenditure during the next four years, the cause of agriculture has expanded, thanks largely to Abraham Lincoln, who approved the Act of Congress, May 15, 1862, creating the Department as a branch of the Federal Government, and on July 2, 1862, the Act of Congress creating the land-grant colleges, with which the Department is now co-operating in the most useful way. Yet with all its enormous growth and the large provision made for its extension and support, the Department has hardly kept pace with the growth of the country. Fifty years ago the wealth of the Nation was \$20,000,000,000 as compared with \$130,000,000,000 at present, while the value of its farm property was about \$8,000,000,000 as compared with more than \$45,000,000,000 now, and its annual farm products were less than \$2,000,000,000, as compared with more than \$9,000,000,000 now. But American agriculture has been making tremendous strides. The land-grant colleges, sixty-seven in number, have a total valuation in endowment, plant, and equipment of \$128,000,000, an income of \$26,000,000, teachers to the number of 4,500, a resident student body of 62,000, and a total number receiving instruction from them of nearly 250,000. The Department, working in harmony with the colleges, with its staff of 17,000 workers and expenditures of \$24,000,000, vitally touches the Nation at nearly every practical point. The value of wealth produced on the farms in 1915 aggregated \$10,501,686,375. Yet less than 32 per cent. of the arable land of the country is under cultivation, and not over 45 per cent. of that under cultivation is yielding reasonably full returns, a condition which the Secretary is trying to cure by the encouragement of improved methods of cultivation and distribution and marketing of the crops.

What has been accomplished during Secretary Houston's administration of his office? The story fully told would fill a volume, and only a few notes may be made here of a few of the achievements. Secretary Houston would be the first to protest against ascribing to himself any undue share of

the credit. There have been many collaborators, many intelligent and active friends of agriculture in Congress, in the ranks of the scientists of the Department, in the land-grant colleges, and among farmers and the farm organizations of the country. Of the highest importance was the enactment of the Agricultural Extension Act by the Congress in 1914, which has been truly described as "one of the most significant educational measures ever adopted by any nation," the object of which is to inform the people promptly and effectively, of all the results of scientific inquiry through personal contact with trained agents. Under this Act provision is made for co-operation between the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant college in each State in the direct education of the farmer and his family in the higher agriculture. When the law is in full operation there may be employed in this service in every one of the 2,850 rural counties of the Union at least two county agents, with district supervisors, supported by all the forces of the college and the Department, at an expense of from ten to twelve million dollars. What this will mean for the farmers may be imagined from the results obtained in one year since the law went into effect—direct demonstrations on 140,000 farms, 600,000 farm visits, 3,000 silos built in the South under the direction of the agents in the field, 75,000 hillsides terraced to prevent erosion, 65,000 acres of land drained, 3,000 demonstration gardens planted, and 500 communities induced to co-operate in some special agricultural work. In the North, 600,000 acres of land tested, 280,000 acres of oats and 85,000 acres of alfalfa planted, and nearly 300,000 boys and girls enrolled in clubs for soil improvement, for crop rotations, and in pig, poultry, hog, sheep, and canning clubs.

Secretary Houston should have a large share of the credit for the creation of the Office of Markets for the purpose of acquiring and diffusing information about the marketing and distribution of farm products. The appropriation for this service has been increased since the passage of the law from \$50,000 to \$1,200,000, and the work of the office consists in establishing proper methods for the grading and standardization, the packing and shipping and marketing of special products, problems of transportation and storage, city marketing and distribution, direct dealing between producers and consumers, and co-operative production and handling of products.

Other legislation enacted during the past four years deals with cotton futures, the grading of grain, the warehousing of agricultural products so that the receipts of the warehouses are available as collateral in banking, the establishment of farm loan banks, and the enactment of the good roads law, by which the Federal Government and the States are made partners in the building of highways for commerce.

The enactment of the Cotton Futures law was an important step towards more satisfactory conditions of production and distribution. It was the first regulative statute passed by Congress for the improvement of marketing conditions. The quotations of future contracts on cotton exchanges have a commanding influence upon the prices paid for spot cotton, and before the passage of this law there were so many different cotton standards in the market that there was no assurance that the buyer would receive the grade of cotton for which he had contracted and which he required in his business. The law imposes generally on all contracts for the future delivery of cotton, made on exchanges, boards of trade, and other like places, a tax of two cents the pound on the quantity of cotton involved and the exemption of such contracts from such tax if the conditions noted in the law, which are aimed at the existing evils in future dealings, are complied with. These conditions require the use of the official standards of the United States in the grading of the staple, the exclusion from delivery on contract of certain inferior grades and qualities of cotton, the adoption of commercial differences in determining the relative values of different grades, and the determination by the Secretary of disputes between the contracting parties as to grade, quality, or length of staple of the cotton tendered on contract. The law, as a whole, is constructive and regulatory, not destructive and oppressive. It recognizes that the exchanges, when properly conducted, may benefit both the producer of raw cotton and the manufacturer of goods. It was enacted in the interest alike of producers, merchants, spinners, and exchange members, and it is doing its work.

A practical illustration of the need for better legislation dealing with the inspection and shipment of grain is supplied by an incident which happened a year and a half ago. The Secretary seized a shipment of \$1,500,000 worth of oats, which the inspectors under the Food and Drugs Act reported contained from ten to thirty-five bushels in the hundred of

weed seed and trash, of which ten carloads had been moistened by sprinklers at the elevators to increase its weight, and that the weed seed had been mixed deliberately at the elevators. Protest was made to the Secretary, who is a man of fair and open mind, that the State inspector had passed the oats and that the foreigners knew what they were getting, and the Secretary said: "If the foreigners know what they are getting then there is no harm in your stating what they are—sixty-five bushels of oats and thirty-five bushels of weed seed," and that settled it. Under the grain-grading law there will be hereafter Federal supervision of shipments of grain in both interstate and foreign commerce, to the advantage of dealers and consumers.

Among other activities of Secretary Houston are the supervision of 155,000,000 acres of national forest land, protecting the forests from fire, promoting the use of water for irrigation and power, regulating grazing, developing forest recreation uses, and conducting many scientific tests for the better utilization of forest products. When the national forests were taken over from the Department of the Interior ten years ago the grazing on these lands was steadily deteriorating and sustained only 1,500,000 animals. Today under scientific management the grazing is steadily improving and the forests are supporting more than 14,000,000 animals.

Then there stands to the credit of the Department of Agriculture the eradication of the cattle tick from 294,000 square miles of territory in ten years, the suppression of the foot-and-mouth disease in all the country from Massachusetts to Montana, the saving of the citrus industry of California, and a score of other invaluable services protecting the orchards and fields and forests from destruction by insect and fungus pests. In addition, new farm products to the value of \$270,000,000 have been promoted by the introduction and development of new crops, and one-third of the total area of the United States has been covered by the soil surveys conducted by this Department.

One of the most important offices in the Department of Agriculture is that of Solicitor, which is charged with the direction of the legal work of the Department. The head of this office is Francis G. Caffey, a practicing attorney in New York for ten years before entering the Government service four years ago. He is one of the most dependable men in any of the departments and has been of inestimable value to the Secretary, whose legal adviser he is, in keeping

the orders and regulations promulgated by the Secretary within statutory authority, so that every official act of the Department has behind it all the force of legislative sanction and judicial decision. He is also at the service of such committees of Congress as may call upon him for counsel.

During the last fiscal year the Solicitor's office drew or examined more than forty bills relating to agricultural matters introduced in Congress, and from the enforcement of the meat inspection laws to the protection of migratory birds through thirty statutes the Solicitor and his seven assistants, all of whom are underpaid, are engaged. Last year they handled 2,623 litigated cases, prepared for administrative officials nearly 3,000 contracts and other legal papers, and rendered 1,382 formal opinions for the guidance of the administrative officers of the Department. In the enforcement of the Food and Drugs Act, for illustration, through the co-operation of this office the Department of Justice obtained in the way of fines and recoveries in the three years from 1914 to 1916 the sum of \$358,772. During the same period the Solicitor recovered for the Government 153,409 acres of valuable land which had been illegally entered by private parties, worth in timber value alone \$1,350,000. In construing the Cotton Futures act the Solicitor has given one hundred and fifty legal opinions for the benefit of the public in the last two years, and all this immense work has been done at an expenditure of only \$61,400.

Under the care of Secretary Houston there is one-fifth of the standing timber in the United States, 42 per cent. of the water power of the West, and 31 per cent. of all the water power in the Nation. He is required to administer thirty laws passed by Congress. He was a member of the board appointed to locate the banks of the Federal Reserve System, he was consulted when the Farm Loan Bank System was under consideration, he is a member of half a dozen boards of one sort and another, engaged in planning for the building up of a Greater America, and is a fairly busy man who keeps his wits about him and whose only care is in doing his work well. The only thing he covets is a better popular understanding of the aims and purposes of the Department of Agriculture and, most of all, the whole-hearted co-operation of the business men of the country, especially the business men of the large cities, in the great work entrusted to him.

Proof of the efficiency of the Department of Agriculture, if proof were needed, is to be found in the very remarkable work Secretary Houston has done since the declaration of war with Germany. His task would be impossible but for the thorough organization of his Department, which is working with German-like efficiency to meet the emergency.

Secretary's Houston's first care is the increased production of food crops, their better distribution and conservation. The conservation of food supplies cannot be achieved without the elimination of waste which it is estimated amounts to at least \$700,000,000 annually; the distribution cannot be effected without better control of the marketing and transportation facilities of the country, and the largest production cannot be secured except by the cultivation of every acre of arable land, and the employment of all available labor and its proper handling so that it can be shifted as the necessities of cultivation and harvesting may require. The food crops must be graded or standardized so that their value may be fixed, all establishments or factories in which food or feeds are prepared, manufactured or kept for sale or distribution must be under Government supervision and regulation or operation whenever it may be necessary to the public welfare, and in emergency the Government must be empowered to purchase, store, and sell food products to organized groups of people or communities; and with this power must go also the power to fix the maximum or minimum prices of such products. All this and much more must be done to make the United States economically effective in war and prosperous in peace; and to make his efforts supremely successful Secretary Houston has asked for the enactment of a law which will provide "for the national defense by stimulating agriculture and facilitating the distribution of agricultural products." The law will prohibit under heavy penalties injurious speculation in food supplies, the hoarding of foods, food materials, feeds, seeds or fertilizers for speculative purposes, the charging of excessive rates for the handling or distribution of such products and the exaction of excessive prices for them. The law will also give the Secretary authority to direct the distribution of such supplies, to regulate the method of packing commodities for sale, to license, if necessary, the manufacture or distribution of foods, to fix prices so that there will be no extortion, to prescribe the percentages of

flour that shall be derived from wheat of various classes and grades, to require that flour shall be labeled and sold for what it is, and to provide such other regulations as will promote the conservation and utilization of foods and feeds and provide for their proper distribution.

Secretary Houston has been pressing his campaign throughout the country with great zeal and has enlisted for the war the agricultural and economic agencies of all the land—farmers, manufacturers, the agricultural and industrial press, the labor organizations, the colleges, the women and children, and has done his work thoroughly. It was to be expected, of course, that there would be some opposition in Congress to the measures he has proposed and among the people who would fatten upon the country in its distress, just as there has been opposition to every proposition that has been made by the President for the defense of the country. An illustration of how the Secretary deals with the slackers may be noted here to show that he is keeping his head. One day not long ago four or five of these pestilent creatures called on him to protest against the regulation of the wheat supply of the country when something like this colloquy took place.

Slackers: "Mr. Secretary—There is an abundant supply of wheat; the only trouble is the lack of transportation to get it to market."

The Secretary—"What is the price of wheat now?"

Slackers—"The price is \$2.32 the bushel."

The Secretary—"If I will guarantee to provide the transportation to get this wheat to market, and I think I can make such guarantee, will you guarantee a reduction in the price of the wheat?"

There was no answer and the Slackers made their exit without further parley. That's Houston's way. He knows what he is doing, and he is making now the bravest fight that was ever made for the deliverance of the people from the manipulation of the money changers. Will he win out? How can he lose? It is his business to feed not only the people of the United States but the people of the whole neutral world and the Allies of the United States besides, and he is going to do it.

J. C. HEMPHILL.